

Nepal

Gurkhas and Newars of the Himalayan Valley

By Percy Brown

Author of "Picturesque Nepal," "Sikkim," etc.

OF the series of more or less parallel chains of mountains which separate Northern India from the rest of Asia and form the Himalayas, nearly one-third is occupied by the Independent State of Nepal. Stretching for five hundred miles along the middle section of the range, and averaging in width one hundred and fifty miles, it contains within its borders two of the highest mountains in the world. On its northern confines rises Mount Everest, visible from many of the accessible portions of the State; while on its eastern boundary is Kinehinjunga, the third highest peak on the earth's surface. Leading up to these great natural buttresses of the Central Asian tableland are range upon range of mountains bewildering in their complexity and comprising the greater part of the territory of Nepal.

On its southern border, however the lower spurs of the Himalayas slope down into the plains of India, and here it includes a narrow fringe of cultivated land where rice and other crops are grown, and from which a considerable amount of the revenue of the State is derived. But the general character of the

remainder of the country is a confused mass of mountains, in most parts of which the foot of the white man has never trod, and where the inhabitants, sparsely distributed, eling in their little hamlets on the hillsides to eke out a precarious livelihood by agriculture or the keeping of cattle.

Within the whole of this considerable area of broken country there are no plateaux or plains, no flat places of any importance, save one, a comparatively restricted space some twenty miles long and fifteen miles wide, almost in the centre of the State, and known as the Valley of Nepal. In this small hollow, surrounded by a girdle of high hills, on a tract of alluvial soil, much of

it heavily scarred by erosion, lies the city of Khatmandu, the present capital of the country. Here is gathered together the greater part of its population; here are the palaces of its rulers, the offices of its government, its temples and shrines, its commerce and its crafts—in a word, here beat the heart and pulse of the State; for outside the valley there are no towns and but few villages of any consequence, no roads or means of communication except mountain



DECORATIVE FASHIONS OF NEPAL

All well-to-do Nepalese women are lavish in their display of trinkets; many of them delight in heavy silver necklaces and nose ornaments of gold, brass, or silver



STURDY MATERIAL FROM WHICH BRAVE SOLDIERS ARE MADE

The name Nepal brings speedily to mind another name, that of the Gurkha, for it is from this small independent kingdom in the Himalayas, chiefly from its central zone, that the Gurkha regiments of India draw their recruits—men, small but strongly-built, possessing the courage of lions, whose warlike and faithful natures have stamped them as some of India's finest soldiers

Photo, V. S. Manley

tracks, no industries or trade centres, nothing except the wildest and most desolate mountain scenery.

The Valley of Nepal, therefore, constitutes the State itself. Originally the bed of a lake 4,500 feet above the level of the sea, the legend runs that long years ago its waters were released by the god Manjusri, who cleft the surrounding mountains with his sword. Through the chasm thus made, to this day known as the Kot-bar, or "sword cut," the lake drained away, leaving a level piece of ground on which the original inhabitants of the district laid the foundations of the State.

From that time Manjusri has been the patron saint of Nepal, and representations of him, easily identified by his uplifted sword, are seen in much of the ancient art of its people. This artistic fancy is in all probability founded on a scientific fact. Geologists are of the opinion that at some remote period a convulsion of the earth's surface took

place, and that the lake burst its boundaries, its escaping waters forming what is now the Baghmati river.

There is little doubt that a road following the course of the upper reaches of this river, which ultimately joins the Gandak to feed the Ganges, would be the readiest means of maintaining communication with the plains of Hindustan. A track up the gorge of the Baghmati does exist, but this point of access to the valley is not encouraged, and apparently, for strategic reasons, the only recognized route to the seat of the government follows a line to the west, and over much more difficult country. The character of this approach aids Nepal not a little in preserving that policy of "splendid isolation" to which it has all along committed itself.

By the main road Khatmandu lies some seventy-five miles from the nearest railway station of Raxaul. During its course this track—for only a few sections of it can lay claim to being called a



FANTASTIC IMAGERY OF ORIENTAL ARTISTRY

Bhātgaon, one of the old Newar capitals of Nepal, lying to the south-east of the modern capital of Khatmandu, is rich in beautiful old buildings, all of which are the handiwork of Newar architects, experts in wood and metal decorations, and this beautifully-carved façade and flight of steps, with its grotesque array of stone images, illustrate vividly the distinctive character of their skill

Photo, J. Claude White



NATIVE BEARERS OF NEPAL WITH THEIR DANDY

The sturdy hill tribes of Nepal are admirably fitted for the burdensome tasks that oftentimes fall to their lot, and can traverse the high mountain ranges with a tireless agility only equalled by the hardy wild goats which abound in the Alpine zone of the Himalayas. Large, weighty packs slung across their shoulders, or the dandy—a hoodless form of sedan chair, come never amiss to them

highway—encounters three natural barriers. The first of these, met shortly after the road leaves the plains of India, is a belt of forest-land known as the Terai. Only averaging about twenty miles in depth, for the greater part of the year it has a sinister reputation for unhealthiness, as here lurks the dread awal, a deadly form of malarial fever.

During the drier months, however, the Terai may be penetrated with impunity, although, except for wandering jungle tribes, it has few regular inhabitants. On the other hand, it is the haunt of much large game, and

within its vicinity are organized those great hunting expeditions for which the Nepal State is famous. But the ordinary traveller will see little evidence of this, for the traffic over the highway has driven the jungle dwellers, both man and beast, into its deeper fastnesses.

Having passed through the Terai, after a few miles the road surmounts one or two mountain ramparts that lie athwart the route. The first of these culminates in the pass of Sisagarhi, a steep ascent of 2,225 feet, leading to a fort occupied by Nepali troops, with the narrowest part of the defile blocked by

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the bayonet of a Gurkha sentry. From here the path descends rapidly to the bed of the Panoni river, only to rise again by a series of zigzags to the last line of defence crossed by this to the pass of Chandragiri.

From this altitude on a clear day the whole of the extent of the valley comes into the vision, over two thousand feet below, its green fields and meandering streams relieved by the white walls and rambling outlines of its palaces and pagodas. But although apparently so near in the rarefied atmosphere of the mountains, the most strenuous portion of the journey has yet to be accomplished. For the track launches itself

down the mountain side in headlong fashion, tumbling over a torrent of boulders, some of which, however, have been cut into a rude semblance of steps. After two miles of descent the path debouches on to the plain, over which it winds for seven miles among streams and cultivated land until it reaches the suburbs of the capital.

Linked geographically so lightly to the rest of India, it naturally follows that, politically also, Nepal has maintained a condition of considerable independence; in fact, it is the most independent of all the native states of India. Although under the protection of the Government of India, for many



COMMERCIAL FOLK OF THE HIGH REGIONS OF NEPAL

They come of a mountaineering stock and carry on a business in wool and skins which they barter with Tibetans in exchange for foodstuffs, and are often employed as yak-hands. Most of the races occupying Nepal are of mixed Mongol origin; usually short, robust of build, with flat faces, oblique eyes, and yellow-brown complexions, their appearance is decidedly Mongoloid.



LADIES-IN-WAITING OF A NEPALESE COURT CLAD IN THE SILKEN AND FINE RAIMENT OF THEIR CALLING
 From under the three-quarter length tunic flow very full trousers, not unlike those worn by Turkish ladies, and usually made of brightly-coloured muslin or thin silk. Though all colours are fashionable, pink, yellow, and orange are decidedly the favourites. The smart little velvet cap, heavily embroidered in gold, is worn at a jaunty angle, enhancing the attractiveness of the costume, the wearer of which is often very prepossessing, her large brown eyes of undisputed beauty being made additionally languid by the blackening of the lower lids

Photo. / Claude White

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years it also nominally recognized the suzerainty of China. To understand this dual connexion it is necessary to refer to some of the more notable events in its history.

In the earlier years of its evolution the State was closely allied with India. From Hindustan it drew many of its rulers, also its religion and its customs. Various Hindu dynasties prevailed in Nepal during the first centuries of the Christian era; most of these were feudatories of the more powerful kingdoms in the plains, and one of them, in the ninth century, was destined to affect more than a little the chronicles of the country.

For it brought into it a tribe of Mongolian origin called the Newars, whose name in a slightly different form is preserved in the present Nepal. These Newars settled down in the territory to



FAVOURER FEMININE ADORNMENT

Although not given to gaudy styles of dress Nepalese women adorn themselves with multifarious trinkets, shell ornaments being an attractive addition to the native bijoutry



LINED BY LIFE, NOT BY YEARS

The zenith of a Nepalese woman's beauty is reached in her teens, her youthful appearance being of short duration, and at thirty her skin is often quite wrinkled and grooved

Photo, R. Gorbola

which they had been introduced, and to this day, particularly in the towns of the valley, they constitute the largest section of the population.

Throughout most of its history the government of Nepal has been characterised by one peculiarity. Although only a comparatively small country, the kingdom has at very frequent intervals been divided among several rulers, often all members of the same family. To this fact much of the confusion in tracing out its annals has been due.

Under the Newar dynasty this system was followed, and towards the end of the fifteenth century the country was definitely partitioned out among the three grandsons of one of the Newar kings. Such a procedure naturally led to a weakening of authority, and finally to a long period of civil war, in which each of the principalities fought with one another indiscriminately.

In the eighteenth century one of the three rulers finding himself hard pressed by the other two, invited Prithwi

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Narayan, the neighbouring king of the Gurkhas, who occupied a tract to the west of Nepal, to assist him. The result might have been foreseen. Prithwi accepted the call with alacrity, only to turn on his Newar ally and make himself in a few years master of the entire state. Then ensued the Gurkha regime, which, however, in the first flush of its success, and mistaking its own strength, became the aggressor in a conflict with the Chinese.

Possessed of much greater resources, the Chinese were enabled to dictate terms, and thus established a nominal suzerainty which, however, has to all intents and purposes ceased to exist with the passing of the old Chinese Empire. Almost at the same time the Gurkhas came into contact with the British in India, marked at first by the

Gurkha war, but subsequently leading to an understanding that matured into friendly relations most admirably maintained ever since.

Much of this friendliness was brought about by the outstanding personality of Nepal's greatest hero, Jung Bahadur, who was prime minister in the middle of the nineteenth century. Few men, even in the Orient, have carved their way with such signal success to the highest position in the State as this Gurkha soldier, and his influence in Nepal is felt to this day. He organized the present system of administration, which has been likened in one of its most important aspects to that of the Mikado of Japan during the Shogunate.

Briefly, the government is vested in two personages, one who reigns and one who rules. The former is the sovereign,



NATIVE LIFE IN PATAN, ONE OF NEPAL'S THREE GREAT CITIES

Owing to the triple system of government that long prevailed in Nepal, three principal cities, Khatmandu, Bhatgaon, and Patan, each distinct capitals, flourished and maintained a separate existence until the invasion of the country by the Gurkhas. Patan, which from its round conformation is believed by the Newars to be the wheel of Buddha, possesses many handsome edifices

Photo, J. Claude White



WARP AND WOOF AMONG THE WOMEN WEAVERS OF NEPAL

Skilful workmen in arts and crafts, the Newars have almost all the trade and manufactures of Nepal in their hands. The manufactures, though few, include very fine specimens of brass and iron utensils and gold and silver ornaments. Paper is made from the paper-plant, and coarse cotton cloths, which form the clothing of the humbler folk, are produced by the crude native looms

or Maharaj Dhiraj, the nominal head of the State, but the real ruler is the minister, who, while managing the affairs of the country, is dignified with the official title of Maharaja.

Among the four million inhabitants of Nepal, scattered as they are throughout its very diversified country, are many different tribes. Some idea of the variety of its people may be gathered from the fact that at least six different languages are spoken within its borders, from Sanskrit, the classical tongue of

the Hindus, to the almost unintelligible gibberish of the jungle dwellers. But the majority of the population is composed of Gurkhas and Newars.

Both these races possess Mongolian features, with usually little or no hair on their faces; but while the former are short and strong, with heavy muscular limbs and quick action, the latter are slighter, taller, and softer in their bodily development. As is well known, the Gurkha supplies that excellent fighting material which is found

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NEPALESE MOTHER AND CHILD

At the present day, women of Nepal enjoy comparative freedom, and their shapely heads and well-cut features are now seldom seen completely veiled.

not only in the army of Nepal, but also in several famous regiments of the Indian army whose record on the field of battle is second to none.

On the other hand, the Newar follows the arts of peace, for he is a skilled craftsman, and the picturesque architecture of Nepal, with the elaborate wood and metal decoration with which it is embellished, is solely the handiwork of this people.

The dress of the men of both races is somewhat alike, and is not of a very distinctive character, except that around the body is wrapped, in many folds, a long cummerbund, into which is stuck the short curved knife, or kukri, a deadly weapon in the practised hands of the Nepali.

In marked contrast to the somewhat commonplace garb of the men is the particularly striking costume of the women, especially of the upper class. This attire, as worn at festivals and on

state occasions, includes a brilliantly-coloured jacket, opened so as to display another gaily-dyed garment underneath. But it is the voluminous cut of the lower portion of the costume which makes the Nepalese lady's presence so unusual. In many respects it resembles a large balloon, not only in shape but also in construction. Over an elaborate framework of wire and cane, the gorges of the material are laid in many loose folds, so that the whole contrivance oscillates in the most peculiar manner with each movement of the wearer.

Felt slippers of a gaudy hue peep from beneath the costume, but the crowning achievement of this wonderful effort at personal adornment is the treatment of the hair. Parted at the back above the nape of the neck, it is carried over the head as far as the eyebrows, above which it is formed into a heavy fringe. On the top is worn a wreath of red artificial flowers in the shape of a tiara. Add to this a heavily powdered face, lips painted with vermilion, eyes outlined in black peering through large tortoiseshell spectacles, and the picture of a Nepalese high-caste lady in full dress is complete.

The religions of Nepal are Hinduism and Buddhism, these two creeds flourishing side by side, and in some instances combining in the same building. We see Hindu shrines erected within the precincts of edifices consecrated to the Great Teacher, and Buddhist temples decorated with Hindu gods and symbols. In the past, especially among the Newars, both religions appear to have been universally popular, as the numerous sacred establishments found in all parts of the valley amply testify. Holy places occupy every eminence, while the remains of ancient shrines encumber the plain.

Most of these buildings are of considerable architectural merit as well as of antiquarian interest, so that Nepal has been aptly referred to as a veritable museum of archaeology and arts.

Reference has been made already



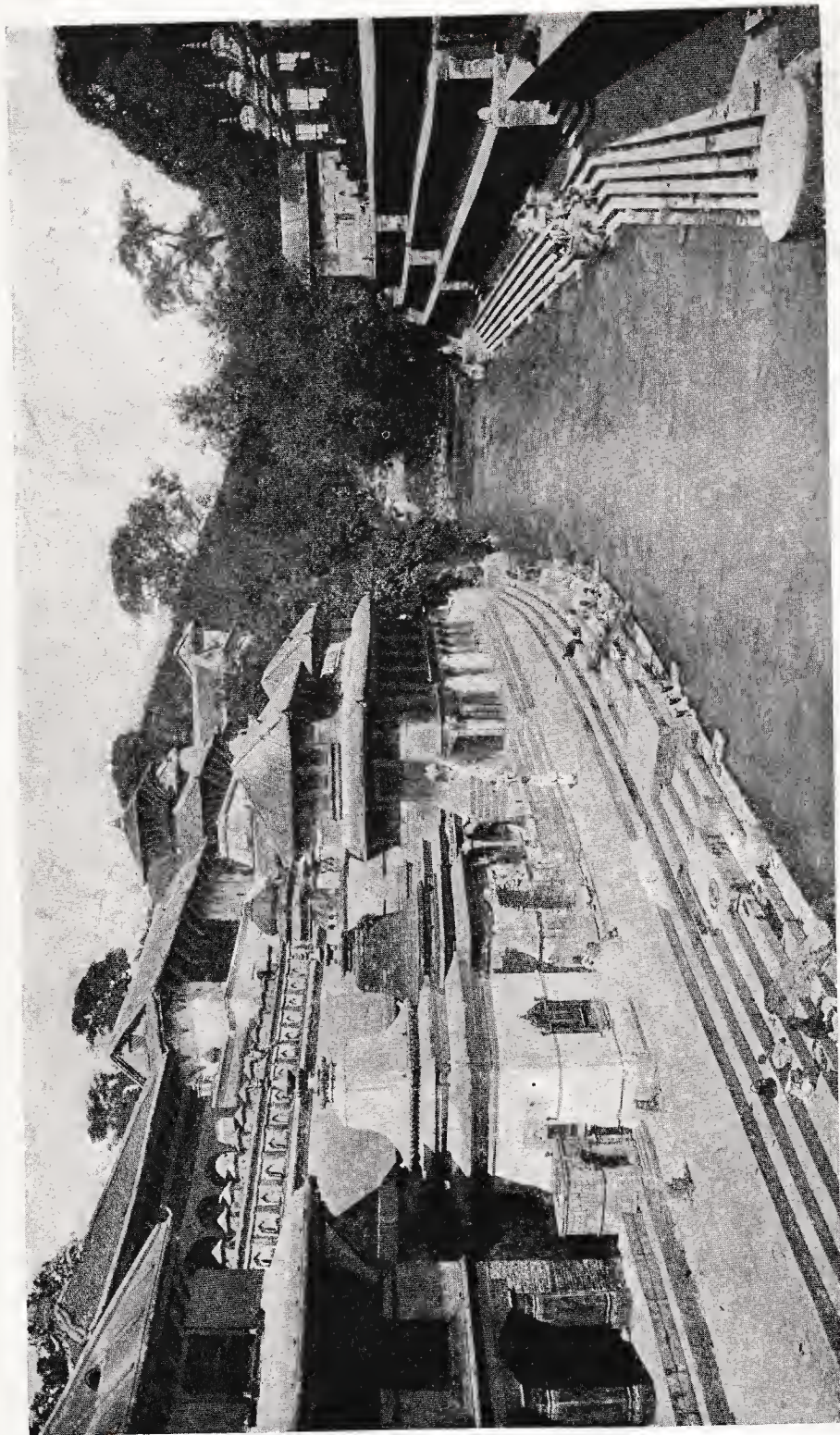
STREET MARKET SCENE IN A DECORATIVE OLD WORLD SETTING

Among a prolific display of quaintly-carved houses, topped here and there by a red-tiled pagoda roof, the marketers of Bhatgaon peddle their wares, while coolies parade the street carrying bamboo poles from which depend baskets of tasty meats, and ghurras filled with "dhye" (sour milk) or toddy, the juice drawn from palm trees which soon becomes highly fermented and intoxicating



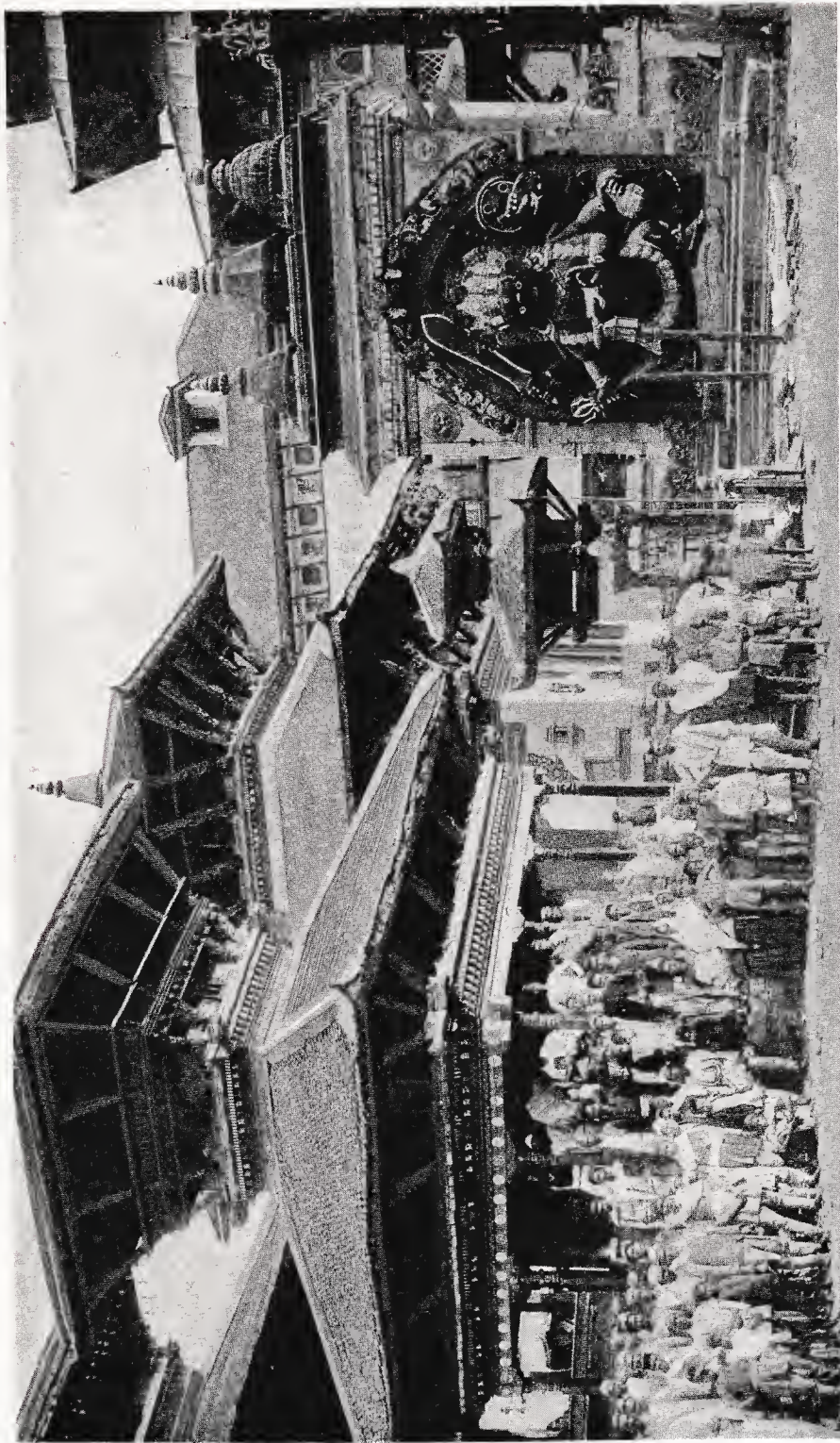
WHERE THE NEWAR CRAFTSMAN'S FANCY IS CUT IN IMMORTAL STONE
Nepal has not unjustly been called a museum of archaeology and arts. In this time-worn street of Bhatgaon structures of great architectural merit, with handsome ornamentation of Oriental design, are to be seen on all sides. The entrances of many of the important buildings are guarded by large stone animals which stand on each step in pairs and are reputed to have great strength

Photos, J. Claude White



PASHPATI, THE HOLIEST PLACE IN NEPAL AND THE OBJECT OF PILGRIMAGE TO THOUSANDS OF HINDUS

Pashpati is considered a town of great sanctity, and innumerable pilgrims from all parts of India come to worship within its walls. The sick and dying are also brought to be immersed in the sacred waters of Baghmati, and the dead are burned on its banks, funeral pyres being built in flat buttresses projecting into the river. During the great annual festival, when for a few days Nepal is thrown open to the religious fervour that with wave-like motion surges from the remotest districts, there is one dense, unending stream of the sick and ailing, chanting as they go: "Pashpati Nath Ke lai"—All hail to Pashpati



CORNER OF KHATMANDU WHERE IS ENSHRINED KALI, THE HINDU GODDESS OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION
 Shrines and temples of fantastic architecture and with golden finials abound in the Nepal valley. This enormous effigy of the formidable goddess Kali, with her necklace of skulls and sinister emblems of destructive power is to be found in a square of Khatmandu, Nepal's capital, where the administration of the State is now centralised. During the festival of the Durga Puja, a procession of the women of Nepal, including members of the royal family, clad in brilliant costumes and carrying red umbrellas, pass before this shrine with great pomp and ceremony

Photo, J. Claude White

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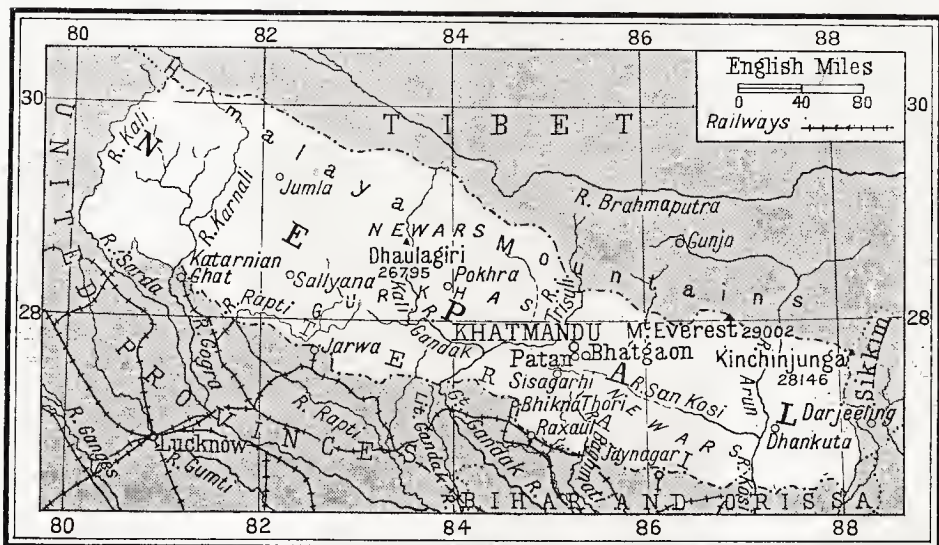
to the triple system of government which has prevailed in Nepal during the greater part of its history. Out of this grew three distinct capital cities, all within a very few miles of one another, each, until the Gurkha invasion, self-controlled and self-contained. Such are Bhatgaon, Patan, and Khatmandu. The two first-named are now more or less deserted as official residences, the administration of the State having become centralized at Khatmandu. But in each the builders seem to have vied with one another as to which could plan and erect the most picturesque collection of public edifices, while the founder obviously employed all the artistic resources of his subjects in their decoration.

Around a series of paved stone courtyards the various public offices have been grouped, while among these may be seen temples for the worship of the local deity, or palaces for the accommodation of the highest functionaries of the State. Some of the more important buildings are approached by flights of steps flanked by carved figures of animals, griffins or grotesque human forms. Stone, wood, and metal are utilised almost equally in the

construction of these edifices, which collectively are known as "the Durbar."

One feature, which is used with considerable effect, is a form of civic statue, usually depicting in metal gilt the kneeling figure of one of the principal rulers of the city it adorns. This is erected on a tall stone pillar surmounted by a lotus capital, and is often the central ornament of the Durbar square.

Such picturesque surroundings make an excellent setting to the many public festivals of the State, when the whole population turns out in gala attire to do homage to a saint, or to commemorate some incident in their religious history. One of these, the Machendranath festival, consists in dragging the image of the god whose name it bears in a triumphal car through the streets of the capital. Four days are spent in the process, as the car is a huge, unwieldy structure, and much complicated ritual is observed at various prescribed points on the route. Other religious ceremonies, celebrated in the same lively manner, occur at frequent intervals, and these, combined with the old-world 'architectural surroundings, present a picture of medievalism which is now becoming rare.



THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF NEPAL AND ITS PEOPLES